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ABSTRACT

Research indicates that the frequency of cheating in the classroom is increasing accelerating. Students continue to utilize the standard methods of cheating such as cheat sheets, copying off of another student's test paper, or telling friends in the next class period what was covered on an exam. With access to the World Wide Web, opportunities to cheat are more readily accessible than they were 10 years ago (e.g., pre-written term papers). Researchers have tried to answer the question of why students cheat. Among the reasons cited are fear of failure, desire for a better grade, pressure from others to succeed in school, low self-efficacy, and competition. Cultural factors in an institution also contribute to academic dishonesty in the classroom. Teachers can proactively initiate changes that will decrease the incidence of academic dishonesty in high school classrooms. Four areas of intervention for teachers and administrators are implementing honor codes, matching coursework assignments to student academic ability, ensuring that there is no opportunity to cheat, and making clear the consequences of cheating (all of which require teacher vigilance). (Contains 16 references.)(SM)

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Academic Dishonesty Among Students: Consequences and Interventions

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Abstract

According to the results of academic research, the frequency of cheating in the classroom is increasing at an accelerating rate. Students continue to utilize the standard methods of cheat sheets, copying off of another student's test paper, or telling friends in the next class period what was covered on an exam. With access to the World Wide Web opportunities to cheat are more readily accessible than they were ten years ago. Researchers have tried to answer why students are cheating and based upon the results of this research, suggestions are made as to what interventions a teacher can put in place to become proactive to the realities of cheating.

Academic Dishonesty Among Students: Consequences and Interventions

Introduction

According to recent studies, academic dishonesty is rampant, with increasing numbers of students admitting to cheating. In studies reviewed for this paper, 70 percent of high school students admit to cheating on at least one exam in the previous twelve months (Josephson, 2002) and 50 percent of students admitted they had used the Internet to commit plagiarism (McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 1999). Astoundingly, of students who admit cheating, 95 percent said they were never caught (Bushweller, 1999). Dishonesty in the classroom has consequences, not only to the student who cheats and his classmates, but it also interferes with classroom instruction because teachers receive an vague depiction of what students really understand. (Murdock, 1999)

Academic dishonesty takes many forms, from pre-written term papers available on the Internet and a multitude of electronic devices that can be brought unobtrusively into the classroom to cheat sheets and copying directly from another's exam. Since cheating is most likely to occur among students who are either at the bottom academically or at the very top who are competing for select spots (McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 1999) cheating skews the teacher's perspective on how well students understand course material. This paper will explore the causal factors behind academic dishonesty in the high school environment and proactive interventions that can assist teachers in decreasing the incidence of cheating.

Student Motivations to Cheat

Academic studies have questioned students on the reasons that they cheat. Among the reasons most cited by students for cheating were the following: fear of failure, desire for a better grade, pressure from others to do well in school, low levels of self-efficacy, and competition. Students also stated that they felt cheating was justified when course objectives were unclear or the teacher was incompetent (Evans and Craig, 1990).

Cultural factors in an institution were also found to contribute to academic dishonesty in the classroom. Cheating took place most often when the culture of the institution or classroom accepted cheating (McCabe & Drinan, 1999). An additional factor that contributed to cheating was that teachers were not willing to confront cheating students (Pullen, 2000). According to Social Learning Theory, in classrooms where there are not observerable negative consequences to cheating, students may be more likely to take part in the unwanted behavior of dishonesty. (Ormrod, 1999). However, teachers may be choosing to ignore cheating because the school administration doesn't support their efforts to report plagiarism or cheating (Carlson, 2002).

Interventions for Teachers and Administrators

What interventions can teachers and administrators enact to reduce the occurrence of student academic dishonesty? There are four areas of intervention that will be examined in this paper: honor codes, student ability, opportunity to cheat and the consequences of cheating, all of which require teacher vigilance.

Honor Codes

Academic studies have shown that schools that have comprehensive honor codes in place experience a decrease in cheating. Honor codes define cheating, clarify the implications (McCabe & Pavela, 1999), and may "...awaken many students to the seriousness of cheating." (Broussard, 2000). It has been noted that, "...the most important element of a(n)...honor code is significant student involvement in designing and enforcing" the institution's academic integrity policies. (McCabe, 1999) Honor codes should include one or more of the following: a written pledge in which students affirm that their work will be their own, students should form or head judicial over-site of the process (McCabe & Pavela, 1999) and details of what constitutes cheating (Broussard, 2000). The honor code should ensure that the consequences of cheating will be fairly, promptly and consistently applied to all students.

Honor codes should be school-wide endeavors. The consequences of academic dishonesty are then the same in all classes in which a student is enrolled and the same to all levels of academic rigor. All teachers at the school then work from the same definition of cheating and the due process afforded to each student is consistent.

Student Academic Ability

Coursework assignments must match a student's current level of academic ability. If a term paper is assigned, the teacher must ensure that students have the knowledge and ability to independently complete the assignment. Teachers can assist students throughout a writing assignment by asking for and commenting on the student's work at each stage of a writing assignment (Gomez, 2001). This will ensure not only that the student's work is his own, but also allow the teacher to provide

feedback to assist the student in any noted deficiencies by scaffolding the student throughout the project.

Performance feedback can also be utilized in other course requirements by allowing a student numerous chances to demonstrate mastery; therefore an individual assessment becomes less high stake (Murdock, 1999).

Opportunity to Cheat

Teachers should endeavor to make classroom cheating impossible. Before every test or project, the teacher should review with students the definition of cheating and the consequences of that action. Courses "...dealing heavily with facts and definitions...lend themselves to cheat sheet use" (Pullen, 2000). Therefore, cheat sheets will become ineffective if tests do not emphasize rote understanding of factual information, but concentrate on higher levels of Blooms Taxonomy, which should include "...emphasizing of strategies over solutions" (Murdock, 1999).

Open-book, practical application exams (Kennedy, 2000) decrease cheating by requiring students to explain their answers (Gomez, 2001). When teachers provide multiple versions of the same test, students are 25 percent less likely to cheat (Gomez, 2001). And by providing multiple versions, (Cole, 2000) and avoiding multiple choice and true/false questions (McCabe, Trevino & Butterfield, 1999) students cannot share the answers in the hallways between classes. Washing desks has also been suggested so that information cannot be shared between classes or saved from a previous day (Bushweller, 1999).

To prevent cheating, the teacher must be a presence in the classroom during tests, roving the aisles, monitoring the students (Bushweller, 1999), and providing alternate seating to space students apart (Cole & McCabe, 2000).

Consequences to Cheating Behaviors

A student is caught cheating; what are the consequences and what can be done to prevent future instances of cheating? Teachers must ensure that there is no incentive for academic dishonesty. The student cannot have the expectation of success if they choose to cheat (Ormrod, 1999). If one student is aware of another being academically dishonest, the student may model the cheating behavior because he does not see any negative consequences, therefore experiences vicarious reinforcement. Likewise, a student who sees another failing a paper because it was plagiarized can learn that the resulting negative consequences via vicarious punishment, the understanding that the behavior will not be tolerated. When students do not observe negative consequences, they are more likely to take part in the unwanted behavior themselves (Ormrod, 1999).

Consequences to cheating must occur in a timely manner. School administration should outline specific punishments for cheating offenses and enforce them consistently. Teachers "... can't let students believe it is okay to cheat" (Bushweller, 1999). Suggestions for consequences of academic dishonesty are: failure of assignment or test, no second chances, parents are contacted, the offense goes on disciplinary records and the student is barred from honor society memberships (Bushweller, 1999).

Conclusion

Teachers can proactively initiate changes that will decrease the incidence of academic dishonesty in high school classrooms. Interventions can take many forms, and a combination should be used. Teachers must decrease the opportunity to cheat in the classroom by ensuring that students are able to perform assignments independently, know the consequences of cheating will be swift and applied equally to all students and know how cheating is defined by the school's honor code.

Although 78 percent of high school students stated, 'It's not worth it to lie or cheat because it hurts your character (Josephson, 1998), the percentage of high school students who participate in some form of academic dishonesty is high. Teachers must be aware of the popular methods of cheating in their schools, be prepared to confront the cheater and dispense the promised consequences to that cheating.

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